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ABSTRACT

In an effort to determine the underlying roots of kindergartners' unruly behavior during dismissal time, this study examined the children's conversational topics during classroom dismissal routines. Using participant observation as the primary method of data collection, researchers observed seven dismissals, each lasting approximately 45 minutes, over a 7-week period. Transcriptions were prepared for tape recordings of the dismissal periods, written accounts, and interviews with the kindergarten teacher and one kindergarten student. Analysis revealed five main categories of conversation: the school bus, going to the rest room, what to take home, "who does this belong to," and saying good-bye. Many of the children's concerns about these topics were voiced in the form of a question that required a response from either the teacher or another child. Results showed that the conversational topics changed and the degree of chaotic behavior diminished as the school year progressed and as children became more familiar with the dismissal routine. (MM)

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Just Before the Bell Rings: Children's Conversational Topics During Kindergarten Dismissal

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Children's Conversational Topics
During Kindergarten Dismissal

Introduction

The focus of this research is on children's conversational topics in the kindergarten classroom during dismissal routines. This topic arose from three separate conversations I had with kindergarten teachers during the first week of school. All three of these teachers were experienced, knowledgeable professionals who appeared to be enthusiastic about teaching and seemed to truly enjoy working with young children. In describing incidents that occurred in their classrooms during the first week of kindergarten, all three of these teachers referred to the lack of organization and the frequently unruly behavior that occurred during dismissal. Specifically, all three teachers used the words "chaos" or "chaotic" to describe kindergarten dismissal. The goal of this research is to examine elements of children's language during dismissal in an effort to explain the underlying roots of this "chaos".

In analyzing the data gathered during seven observations of the dismissal routine in this kindergarten classroom, it became evident that children most frequently talked about things they were concerned or even worried about. Five categories of concerns

emerged: what should be taken home, who does this belong to, going to the restroom, the school bus, and saying good-bye. Many of the children's concerns about these topics were voiced in the form of a question that required a response from either the teacher or from another child. Several of these categories became less evident as the school year progressed, and several did not manifest themselves until the school year was well under way. Also, the level of "chaos" changed dramatically as the children grew more familiar with the dismissal routine. Likewise, the level and type of teacher interactions differed as the school year progressed.

This paper will discuss the categories of concern in the children's conversations mentioned above. Attention will also be given to the changes over time which were observed in both teacher and child interactions during the dismissal routine.

Delimitations

The delimitations in this research involve the number of observations conducted (seven) and the number of classrooms visited (one). As stated previously, the children's conversational topics changed as the school year progressed. The seven observations in this study were done over an eleven week period, in the fall of the school year. The topics that emerged reflected the

children's concerns at that time, but these topics may have changed even more dramatically toward the end of the school year as the children's interests and attitudes evolved with the passage of time. Second, these observations were conducted in one classroom only. Kindergartens in other geographic locations, with different dismissal routines, and children from different backgrounds may vary considerably in conversational topics.

Methodology

The primary method of data collection used in this research was participant observation. My son is enrolled in this kindergarten class and I had discussed with the principal and the teacher my interest in working in his classroom as a volunteer one morning each week. Both the principal and the teacher accepted my offer enthusiastically, and both were agreeable to my request to use about thirty minutes of that time each week to observe the dismissal routine. On my first morning there the teacher introduced me to the class as Mrs. Fox, the mother of one of the children, who would be coming every Friday to "be with us". During my first visits, my role in the classroom was very minimal. I made copies or collated materials for the teacher, and assisted her in writing the children's dictation during art projects or centers.

Site Description

Della Byrd Holt Elementary School (the name of the school and all individuals involved in this research has been changed to protect anonymity) provides the setting for this research. It is located in a mid-size town in north Texas. The building, constructed in 1986, is L-shaped and made of tan brick with bright blue trim. The school is in the northern outskirts of town, right off a minor farm to market road. A housing development is being constructed around the school. These homes are attractive brick structures, ranging in price from approximately $80,000 to $110,000. The land directly adjoining the school to the east and to the north, however, is as yet undeveloped. A fence separates the school grounds on these sides from an area the children call "the forest". This area consists of the scrub oak trees typical in this part of Texas and dense underbrush.

The total population of Holt Elementary fluctuates between 950 and 980 students. Families moving into and out of the school district because of changes in employment account for this fluctuation. The student population is drawn primarily from nearby apartment complexes and trailer parks. These children, as well as a few from outlying rural areas, depend largely on district-provided transportation to and from school.

Thirteen buses service these children daily. The remainder of the children come from the neighborhood immediately surrounding the school. These children may walk to and from school, or rely on their parents for transportation. Approximately 63% of the student population at this school receives free or reduced lunch assistance from the federal government.

Kindergartens in this district are half-day programs. At Holt Elementary there are two full-time kindergarten teachers, each with a morning and afternoon class. This study was conducted in the morning class of the most experienced of the two teachers. Mrs. Barry is a lady in her mid-fifties with 23 years of teaching experience. Mrs. Barry holds a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree in early childhood education.

Mrs. Barry states that she does not place a great deal of emphasis on paper and pencil activities. Her class is literature-based and she uses children's trade books to stimulate oral language, writing, and art activities. Likewise, mathematics in Mrs. Barry's class is manipulative-based and integrated across the curriculum. Mrs. Barry states that it is her "goal to teach to the individual's level for greatest success and challenge".

The most prominent feature in Mrs. Barry's

classroom is a large gray rug used for whole group activities. Mrs. Barry's rocking chair stands at the front of the rug. Windows line the north side of the room. Under the windows are shelves filled with large manipulatives. On the opposite side of the room is a restroom, a sink, and a row of cubby shelves. These shelves are wooden and set into the wall. Below is an open space with brass hooks for hanging coats and backpacks. At a child's eye-level is a row of shelves where the children store their school boxes and supplies. The morning class primarily uses this row of shelves. Another row of shelves tops the first. This row is too high for some of the children to reach without assistance of some sort. These shelves are used primarily by the afternoon class, although a few of the morning children store their belongings there.

The rest of the room is divided into centers. These centers consist of areas for books, listening, housekeeping, art, blocks, computer, writing, science, easel painting, and manipulatives. A large variety of materials is available for the children's use in these centers. Each center is named by a sign hanging overhead.

Morning kindergarten begins at 7:50 a.m. Many of the children arrive earlier for breakfast in the cafeteria or to wait in the gym under the supervision

of an aide. The children are allowed to go to their classrooms at 7:45. Upon entering the children of Mrs. Barry's class typically hang their jackets and backpacks on the hooks in the cubby shelves and then go to the rug to read books and talk quietly until the teacher begins a whole group activity around 8:00. The opening activity usually involves the calendar and a show and tell from one child who has been selected as the "Happy Holter" of the week. A discussion of the day's planned activities comes next, followed by a story related to the curriculum theme of the week. The children then go to centers of their own choosing for 30 to 40 minutes. After cleaning up center activities the teacher guides the children in another whole group activity, usually followed by an art or drawing activity. The children frequently dictate stories or captions to the teacher to accompany these art projects. At approximately 9:45 the children join the other kindergarten class for 20 to 30 minutes of outdoor play. After drinks at the water fountain in the hall, the class returns to the rug in the classroom for a teacher-directed math activity. Time-allowing, the children then engage in free exploration with math manipulatives until time to prepare for 11:00 a.m. dismissal. Just before dismissal the children are directed to go to their cubbies to retrieve their

jackets, backpacks, and any work that they may have put away there during the day. After gathering their belongings the children line up at the door and proceed out of the building to wait on the outside steps for their bus, daycare van, or parents. Two aides supervise the children while they are waiting, giving the kindergarten teachers an opportunity for lunch and preparation for the afternoon class.

There are 16 children in Mrs. Barry's class, nine boys and seven girls. Three of these children are Spanish-surnamed, five of them are African American, and eight of them are Euro-American. All of the children speak English as their primary language. There are no children with physical or learning exceptionalities in the class, although Mrs. Barry voices the concern that two of the boys may be "developmentally young".

Data Collection

When the teacher and the children gathered for their final whole group activity, I retreated to a table in the listening center, midway between the rug and the cubbies. I used a pocket tape recorder to document the conversations that took place on the rug, and I used written running accounts to record the interactions at the cubbies. This routine was repeated for seven observations, each one lasting approximately

45 minutes. All of the observations took place on a Friday, the day I was scheduled to volunteer in the classroom. Only once did any of the children question what I was doing or what the tape recorder was for. Before I could answer, my son, who has been a frequent target of research during my doctoral studies, responded:

> Clarence comes over to where I am sitting by the cubbies.
>
> Clarence: (to me) "Is this a tape recorder?"
>
> I nod in response.
>
> Clarence: "What's it for?"
>
> My son comes over from the rug: "Oh, she's writin' down what we do. She always does that."
>
> Clarence: "What's it for?"
>
> My son: "It's for her school.

Clarence appeared to be satisfied with this answer, although he watched me carefully for the next few minutes.

The dismissal routine in Mrs. Barry's class followed the same pattern in each observation. She and the children came together for a whole group activity on the rug. After the activity concluded, the children were dismissed in one of several ways to go to their

cubbies. After gathering their belongings to take home, the children went to line up at the door. When all of the children were in line, Mrs. Barry led the children out of the classroom, to the outer door, where buses and parents were waiting to take the children home for the day. All of the participants were familiar with this routine. Directions were only needed to identify which child's turn it was to go to the cubbies.

Mrs. Barry and Bert, one of the kindergarten children, were interviewed as key informants in this study. These interviews were conducted independently, and consisted of questions derived from data analysis. These questions dealt with the key informants' interpretations of events during the dismissal routine and the changes in the conversational topics. The interviews were transcribed and selected vignettes are used to explain and supplement the information derived from observations.

Data Analysis

Transcriptions were prepared for the tape recordings, the running accounts, and the interviews. I analyzed these transcriptions with the help of Dr. Lazarus, my professor, and three of my classmates. Agreement on the five categories of conversational topics that emerged was unanimous.

Teacher Interactions

In Mrs. Barry's classroom the dismissal routine usually begins around 10:30 a.m. Prior to this time the children have typically been involved in a whole group activity on the rug in the center of the classroom. Mrs. Barry brings closure to this activity by having the children in some way summarize their activities or observations for the day. This summary may take the form of a question and answer sequence, where Mrs. Barry probes for specific information on the morning's activities, or it may consist of a brainstorming session where the children verbally list in random order the highlights from their school day. A third format for this summary is that Mrs. Barry may do it herself, incorporating descriptions of the day's activities into the verses of a song that the children know. The children are familiar with the concept of replacing phrases in the song with ones of their own or the teacher's making, and do not hesitate to join in the verse once Mrs. Barry has established the pattern. Clarence, who rarely joined in the summarizing activities when they followed either the question-and-answer format or the brainstorming format, was very insistent on making a contribution in the singing format one morning, bringing up an activity from outdoor play that he had particularly enjoyed.

The children have just finished putting up their math manipulatives. Mrs. Barry gets out her guitar and sits down in the rocking chair. She begins to play and sing.

Mrs. Barry: "My Lord, what a morning."

Clarence pulls on the teacher's leg: "What about blowin' bubbles?"

Mrs. Barry continues singing. Most of the children join in.

Mrs. Barry and Children: "My Lord, what a morning when the sun begins to shine."

Clarence: "What about blowin' bubbles?"

Mrs. Barry continues singing: "My Lord, what fun we had. My Lord, what fun we had."

Clarence: "What about we had fun blowin' bubbles outside..."

Mrs. Barry (singing): "When we all went outside to blow bubbles."

Mrs. Barry gives a final strum on the guitar. She leans toward Clarence and in a fast, staccato voice: "Clarence, I can't even sing because you keep yellin' and talkin' right in my ear." (In a slower, softer voice.) "When are you going to learn about waiting and not interrupting?"

Mrs. Barry also used a song to indicate the transition

between the summarizing activity and the dismissal routine. Most often this song began without any announcement or introduction. Mrs. Barry would simply begin to sing and the children would join in. The song consisted of one phrase, "We had a very good day, today!", repeated four times to the tune of "Turkey in the Straw". This song was used consistently at every dismissal. Many of the children would rise from their sitting positions to their knees when they heard this song, in preparation for the directions to go to their cubbies that they knew would come next. Although the rest of the class was called to go to their cubbies in a variety of ways, the first two children called were always the leader of the day and the special person of the week. The rest of the class was called according to the color of their clothes or their shoes, by gender, or by how well they were meeting the teacher's behavioral expectations for that transition time. There was no discernible pattern for Mrs. Barry's choice of criteria for calling children to their cubbies, although Mrs. Barry herself states that she tries to tie her "calling criteria" into whatever the group has been talking about during their closing activity.

After going to their cubbies and collecting their belongings to take home the children then proceed to

get in line at the door. The directions for doing so are given as children are called to go to their cubbies, "The boys may go to their cubbies and then line up," and seldom have to be repeated after the children have gathered their backpacks.

During the first few observations at the beginning of the school year Mrs. Barry's role in the dismissal routine was a very active one. She frequently and repeatedly moved from the group of children seated on the rug, to the children at the cubbies, to the children lining up at the door. While at these locations her interactions with the children were typically verbal and were usually on an individual basis. The topics of these verbal interactions were generally focused in one of two areas. The first of these was to answer individual questions from the children. These questions centered around topics which became the coding categories to be discussed later. The second category of verbal interaction centered around behavior management. Mrs. Barry offered children reminders such as "Patrick, where is your place in line?" and "Remember, we always walk in the classroom." On all the occasions observed reminders of this type were sufficient to obtain compliance to the teacher's behavioral expectations, and no other management strategies were either utilized or needed.

As the school year progressed, Mrs. Barry's role in the dismissal routine changed. Gradually she was needed less at the cubbies to help children gather their belongings, and she eventually stopped going over there at all. Instead of moving between these three points, Mrs. Barry began to stay on the rug until almost half the children had been called to go to their cubbies and line up. From the rug she would go to the head of the line of children at the door, sometimes pausing midway to interact with a child. When questioned about this change in her activities during dismissal, Mrs. Barry indicated that she had been unaware of the change in her movements, but that she guessed it was due to the children's increasing self-sufficiency. She was no longer needed at the cubbies to help with zippers and papers, but was still needed on the rug to call children to their cubbies and at the door for questions and farewells.

Results

As stated previously, the children's verbalizations during this time, both to each other and to Mrs. Barry, focused on their concerns and interests. As did Mrs. Barry's activities during dismissal, the child's concerns and interests changed and evolved as the school year progressed. Topics that were not in evidence at the beginning of the year later became

dominant in the dismissal conversation. Likewise, major concerns verbalized by the children early in the school year were scarcely mentioned a few months later. On many occasions the children expressed these concerns in the form of a question, requiring a response from the closest adult or peer. This questioning approach apparently fulfilled two needs for the children. First, through questions the child was able to obtain the needed information. Second, questioning opened the door for reassurance, something probably much needed, particularly in the first weeks of school.

School Bus

One of the most dominant conversational themes early in the year was the school bus. Early conversations about the school bus were divided between the riders and the would-be riders. The riders were at once proud of the fact that they did ride the bus, and yet concerned about the driver's ability to get them to their homes. Clarence did not begin riding the bus home until the third week of school. On his first day to do so, he mentioned it proudly several times during the morning, particularly to friends who had been regular bus riders for several weeks now. But during the dismissal routine, Clarence spoke to Mrs. Barry on the rug, anxiety clearly evident on his face:

Clarence: Do they know where my house at?

> Do they know where my house at? Teacher, the buses--do they know where my house is?
>
> Mrs. Barry: "Oh, yes, Clarence--the bus driver will know where you live. Don't worry!"

Clarence, somewhat reassured, went on to get in line, and had a very successful first experience on the bus. Hereafter, his comments about the bus were limited to general announcements of its arrival. Jesse likewise experienced a similar anxiety when he first began to ride the bus. After a few successful trips on the bus, though, he was able to tell his teacher with confidence, "Mrs. Barry, now the bus driver knows where I live." For Alec, the anxiety over riding the bus lingered for several days, perhaps manifesting itself in an upset stomach that required at least one trip to the restroom during dismissal.

Riding the bus home appears to be a coveted experience. Clarence's announcements of the bus's arrival always drew several children to peer out the door. At one time or another each of the bus riders made some sort of announcement during the dismissal routine about their status as a bus rider. Bert, a would-be rider, made several attempts to join the riders. His mother reports that on at least three occasions he asked her for permission to ride the bus

home the following day. Each time she explained to him that it was not up to her to give permission because the bus did not go to their neighborhood. So Bert next approached his teacher:

Bert: "Mrs. Barry, will you talk to the bus driver today?"

Mrs. Barry: "I'm sorry, Bert. Tell me again."

Bert: "Will you talk to the bus driver today?"

Mrs. Barry: "Talk to the bus driver about what?"

Bert: "I want somebody to talk with the bus driver about going to my house so I can ride old bus 98 or old bus 99".

Mrs. Barry: "Well, it's not up to the bus driver, Bert. He has to go where the district tells him to go. He can't go just anywhere we want him to."

Bert: "Well, it's not fair that everybody gets to ride the bus except me."

Mrs. Barry: "Do you remember I told you that you would get to ride the bus when we go to North Texas for our eye and ear screenings? You can ride the bus then."

Bert: "I want to ride it today."

Mrs. Barry: "Your mother is here to take you home today. Now go sit down with your partner."

Bert looks disappointed. He goes to the rug but doesn't sit with a partner.

Although the bus was a frequent topic of conversation during dismissal in the early weeks of school, it became less so as the school year progressed. When questioned about this, one student replied that "everybody knows about the bus now." The novelty of the school bus apparently wore off within a few weeks, and was replaced in the children's conversations by topics of more current interest.

Restroom

An opposite trend has been observable in a second category of dismissal conversation--that of going to the restroom. This category differs from the others because it does not indicate a definite topic for dialogue between the children, but rather a specific type of question the children asked of the teacher. During initial observations, requests to use the restroom were nonexistent. It was not until the fourth week of school when Alec began to ride the bus, that this question emerged during dismissal time. As stated earlier, Alec's anxiety over riding the bus manifested itself in some stomach problems that necessitated

frequent visits to the restroom. Mrs. Barry indicated that this had become a regular part of Alec's dismissal routine. Alec's initiation of this routine during dismissal evidently served as a daily reminder to several other children, for once he had asked permission, at least one and sometimes two other children followed his lead and asked permission as well. The incidents of asking to go to the restroom increased from zero during the first two observations to four in the sixth and seventh observations. Mrs. Barry theorizes that the increased number of children requesting permission to go to the restroom may be due to their experiences with having to go sometime during their rides home or to their afternoon care and being unable to.

What to Take Home

A third category that emerged during data analysis was that of discussion about what to take home from school. In the first six observations nine separate discussions of what to take home were observed. Interestingly, only three of these discussions involved questions of Mrs. Barry. In each of the conversations with Mrs. Barry, a child asked her for permission to take home a particular project that had been completed that day. The following vignette is typical of these discussions:

Elizabeth (at the cubbies): "Can I take my picture home?" She is holding a large piece of manilla paper covered with red, yellow, and blue paint.

Mrs. Barry: On, yes! Your mother will want to see what you did today."

Elizabeth stuffs the paper in her backpack and then goes to the door to line up.

The six other discussions of what to take home were all between the children. Only one of these discussions involved a specific question about what to take home of another child. On this occasion the asker of the question requested an affirmation of the teacher's earlier instructions.

Theodore, Elizabeth, and Melinda are at the cubbies.

Elizabeth: "Can I take my Columbus picture home?"

Melinda: "No, she's going to make it into a book."

Elizabeth: "Okay."

Elizabeth and Melinda go to the door together.

The other five interactions, however, were based upon one child's observations of another. In these instances the child who initiated the interaction

noticed when another child was taking something home that was supposed to have been left at home. These conversations indicate that the children have at some time been told by either the parents or by Mrs. Barry which of their belongings are to remain at school and which are to be brought home. During the first observation Clarence shared this information with Ana:

> The three students called to the cubbies begin getting their backpacks.
>
> Ana: "I can't reach it. I can't reach my box." She jumps up to try to reach her box on the top shelf. It is too high for her.
>
> Clarence: "You don't need your box--just your backpack."
>
> Ana: "Okay." She gets her backpack and goes to the door, trailing it on the floor behind her.

Ana evidently incorporated this information into her understanding, because several days later she shared it with Dave.

> At the shelves Dave starts to put his school box in his backpack.
>
> Ana (to Dave): "You don't get to take your box home."
>
> Dave looks up at her, and pauses in putting his box in his backpack.

Jesse (to Dave): "You get to take you box home when you graduate outta here!"
Dave puts his box back on his shelf and zips his backpack up. Dave and Ana go to the door to line up. Jesse stuffs two papers in his backpack and follows them.

Jesse mentioned graduation four times during these observations and on two occasions other children referred to the fact that Jesse had graduated from preschool. During an interview specifically on this topic Jesse revealed that his year at preschool had ended with a rather elaborate graduation ceremony and that he expected his kindergarten year to end similarly. When asked why graduation was important, Jesse responded: "'Cause it means you're done with this school and you aint never comin' back!"

Who Does This Belong To?

A fourth category of conversation that emerged during data analysis was that of "who does this belong to?" There was at least one such conversation during each observation. All of these conversations but two were initiated when a child noticed something out of place, such as a paper on the floor or a jacket left hanging on the cubby hooks. The child then made a general statement ("There's somebody's jacket.") or asked a general question ("Who's jacket is this?") of

the group. This question or statement was repeated until the owner responded.

> Theodore picks up a backpack from where it has fallen off a child's hook. He holds it up high.
>
> Theodore: "Who's backpack is that? Who don't have a backpack?" He walks around in a small circle. "Who's backpack? Who's backpack? Who's backpack?"
>
> Alec comes over to Theodore.
>
> Alec: "It's mine." He takes the backpack from Theodore and they both go to the line at the door.

If none of the children responded, the repetition of the question or statement continued until Mrs. Barry responded with directions on what the finder should do with the object.

> Howard bends down and picks up a pencil from the floor. He holds it up in the air.
>
> Howard (as if making a general announcement): "Here's somebody's pencil. Here's somebody's pencil."
>
> Mrs. Barry is at the door. She turns to look at Howard.
>
> Mrs. Barry: "Howard, thank you very much. You can put that down right there. Thank you

very much."

Howard puts the pencil on the counter by the sink where the art supplies are kept.

The remaining two interactions on this topic were geared to specific children. A child had noticed another child drop an object, and then made an effort to return the object to its owner.

Saying Good-bye

The last category of conversation to emerge is perhaps the most complex and difficult to understand. It is that of saying good-bye. This category did not emerge until the last three observations. Prior to this, Mrs. Barry's farewells to the children had always assumed the form of "I'll see you tomorrow" or "I will not see you until Monday." Generally, a few children would echo Mrs. Barry, but the words "good-bye" did not emerge. During the fifth observation, however, my own role as a participant observer changed somewhat. Previously during centers, whole group time, and outdoor play, I had been engaged in activities such as collating materials or making copies for Mrs. Barry. During this observation, however, at Mrs. Barry's request I assumed a much more interactive role with the children. I worked with Theodore, Bert, and Clarence in the block center, Ana at the art table, and Alyssa and Melinda at the computer. During dismissal on that

day the following conversation took place:

Mrs. Barry (to the children): "I'm going to walk around. You're not supposed to be walking around--except if Mrs. Fox calls us--you're name."

Jesse: "Her name is Mrs. Fox?"

Mrs. Barry: "Her name is Mrs. Fox. She is _____'s mom."

Timmy comes over to me on his knees.

Timmy: "I know your name."

Me: "Now you know it, don't you?"

Timmy: "Mrs. Fox, Mrs. Fox."

Shortly thereafter Mrs. Barry began to call the children to go to their cubbies. As they walked from their cubbies to the door to line up, Elizabeth, Roberto, and Alyssa all said to me in passing "Bye, Mrs. Fox." These good-byes were all said independently, in the space of about five minutes. My reintroduction to the class was somehow significant to the children. Perhaps it helped them to realize that I was a permanent, though intermittent, member of their class population. Whatever the effect, during my next observation Ana told me good-bye as she left the cubbies to go line up, and in line Ana repeated her good-bye to a classmate, and then to Mrs. Barry, who responded with a hug. During my final observation,

Jesse and Theodore told me good-bye and Theodore also told his teacher good-bye. Several subsequent visits to the classroom have revealed that good-byes are said now during the dismissal routine by different children to me, to their teacher, and to each other. When questioned about this conversational category, Mrs. Barry suggested that the children had only recently begun to say good-bye because they had previously been occupied with learning the dismissal routine. It was only now that they were comfortable with the group's activities and their own responsibilities during dismissal that they were able to think about others in the classroom and their relationships to them.

Conculsions

In this study, change emerged as a significant aspect of the kindergarten dismissal routine. Change was evident in the teacher's movements about the classroom and interactions with the children during dismissal. As the school year progressed, Mrs. Barry was able to become much more passive in the physical aspects of the children's departure, such as packing backpacks and zipping jackets, and much more emotionally interactive with the children in saying good-byes and answering questions. Likewise, the children changed. As they grew more familiar with the dismissal routine they needed less adult assistance and

reassurance. Their conversational topics changed as well, indicating a movement from egocentric concerns to experience-based interests and mutually relevant interactions with peers.

The categories of conversation during kindergarten dismissal indicate that children most frequently talk about things in their environment that concern and interest them. Most often their conversations focus on immediate events that have direct relevance to their daily routines, such as how they will get home or using the restroom before they leave. Many of the interactions initiated by children during dismissal are attempts to be helpful to the teacher or to other children. Similarly, many of their interactions are requests for information and reassurance by peers and adults. Overwhelmingly, the children's conversations recorded in this study were purposeful. Although the teacher may have characterized the dismissal routine as "chaotic", the children's conversations attempted to meet their very real needs for information, reassurance, and assistance.

Implications

For classroom teachers aware of the nature of children's conversational topics it may be possible to alleviate some of the dismissal "chaos." Discussing and/or dramatizing the bus ride home may help children

to overcome their nervousness. A scheduled restroom break immediately prior to dismissal may help prepare children for the transition between school and their afternoon activities. Identifying beforehand the materials that will stay at school and how they will be used and stored may help to ease children's confusion about what to take home each day. Classroom teachers may find many other ways to help children deal with the issues that concern them during dismissal. Listening to children's needs during this time and taking steps to meet those needs will do much to diminish the "chaos" of the dismissal routine.

Further Research

As mentioned earlier, the delimitations in this study involve the small number of observations in only one classroom. Extensive research in kindergarten programs of varying geographic locations, classroom populations, and formats is necessary to determine if the categories observed are generalizable beyond the present population. Further research in Mrs. Barry's classroom is necessary to understand the continuing evolution of the teacher's role and the children's interactions during dismissal, as well as the changes in the children's conversational topics as the school year progresses.